

Dragonshards

The Elves of Valenar, Part 2

By Keith Baker



National Character

The Valenar are a martial culture. Members of a warband are always searching for glory. To the Valenar, war is an art and a game. The heroes of Xen'drik relied on guerilla tactics in which stealth and skill were more important than raw strength. When fighting a weak foe, the Valenar may engage in straightforward battle to eliminate the enemy quickly before moving on to more challenging enemies. When dealing with a challenging opponent, however, the elves take their time, stalking, weakening the enemy, and enjoying the game. This is true on all levels, including society, which is why wars among the elves can last centuries. With their long lifespans, the elves do not see history in the same way as humans, and they rarely feel a sense of urgency.

The predatory nature of the Valenar is reflected in all aspects of life. Whether a Valenar elf is engaged in a philosophical debate, bargaining with a merchant, or searching for an ancient treasure, the elf always views the situation from the standpoint of hunter and prey.

Valenar are organized into warclans and warbands. These are military units that also incorporate strong emotional bonds. A Valenar puts his patron ancestor above all things, followed by members of his warband, and only then by members of his blood family.

Valenar typically wear loose, silk clothing and light armor decorated with elaborate engraving and embroidery. One unusual tradition is the use of red or brown patterns mimicking blood spatters or stains so that the gore of battle will blend with the elf's clothing. A common accoutrement is the *zaelta* -- "spirit mask." This veil is practical in the harsh environment of the Blade Desert, but it also helps the wearer submerge his identity within that of his ancestor. A Valenar warrior usually wears the sigil of his ancestor on his helmet or as a brooch; thus, those looking at the elf see his ancestor, not the mortal warrior.

Valenar Religion: The Past in the Present

Valenar elves revere their ancestors. Whereas the Aereni preserve their ancestors beyond death and rely on their advice, the Valenar (indeed, all Tairnadal elves) seek to recreate the glorious deeds of their martial ancestors, thus allowing the ancestors' spirits to live again in the present age.

When an elf is born, the Keepers of the Past read the signs to determine the patron ancestor that will guide the elf through life. It is the duty of the child to honor and emulate this particular ancestor, though he should also strive to bring glory to his entire family. Many elves can share the same patron ancestor. This leads to competition among the elves as each strives to be the perfect embodiment of the common patron.

The relationship between the Tairnadal and the Undying Court varies from elf to elf. The Undying Court played a vital role in the battle against the dragons, and the Tairnadal respect these powerful and ancient elves. This attitude is common among the older warriors who fought side by side with the Aereni. Some younger elves see the Aereni as stagnant and cowardly and claim that the councilors of the Undying Court are not true heroes.

Keepers of the Past can be clerics or bards. A Valenar bard following this religion may take *spirit steed* as a 4th-level spell. A cleric of the Keepers of the Past can choose between the Destruction, Protection, and War domains, substituting *spirit steed* (4th) and *heroes' blade* (9th) for the corresponding spells on the War domain list. The Spirits of the Past are neutral, and the favored weapon of the Keepers is the double scimitar.

The Valenar in Battle

The Valenar are peerless warriors. Sword for sword, they have no equals in Eberron. Their low population is the greatest factor holding them in check. This skill is represented by the use of PC classes and high character levels. Most veteran Valenar soldiers are rangers of 4th to 6th level. With this level of skill, even a band of eight to twelve elves can pose a significant threat.

Valenar soldiers prefer light armor and rely on speed and skill as opposed to pure force. The Valenar are renowned for their cavalry; most soldiers possess a deep bond with their mounts. Common feats include Combat Expertise, Dodge, Mounted Combat, and all of the feats that build on these foundations.

While they are best known for their cavalry, the Valenar take great pride in skill with the scimitar and double scimitar -- so much so that all Valenar receive their racial Weapon Proficiency bonus in scimitar rather than longsword. Foremost among their swordsmen is an order of blade specialists known as the *Jaeldira*, "blade dancers." These are monks who often advance using the dervish prestige class presented in *The Complete Warrior*. Jaeldira monks may take Double Steel Strike as their bonus feat at 2nd or 6th level, applying this feat to the double scimitar instead of the double-bladed sword.

Magic also plays an important role among the armies of the Valenar. The ancient elves took the secrets of magic from their giant masters, and many of the heroes of old were wizards. Most Valenar warbands include at least one evoker or conjurer. Valenar of other classes often take a level or two of wizard. Many Valenar rangers prefer *mage armor* to leather or steel, and *mount* is an invaluable aid to a cavalry master whose steed falls in battle (this spell is seen as calling on the spirit of a Valenar warhorse, even though the abilities of the shadowy steed are far more limited). Most Valenar wizards have birds as familiars because these creatures are so useful for scouting fields of battle.

Questions to Ask

A Valenar elf's personality is strongly influenced by his patron ancestor. The Valenar strive to emulate their ancestors in all ways. When constructing a Valenar character or NPC, take some time to describe the patron ancestor. What was he known for? Was he a legendary archer or a swordsman? A poet? A traitor? What was his greatest battle? How did he die?

Another important question is why the elf is away from Valenar and his warband. If you start at 1st level, you are less skilled than the typical Valenar ranger. Here are a few options to consider:

- In the past, young Tairnadal would spend decades sparring against others of their age. At 1st level you are a novice warrior, but you believe you will gain glory and skill more quickly in the world than in the fortresses of Aerenal and Valenar. Your family may support your choice or you may be rebelling against tradition.
- Your ancestor was a paragon of honor and virtue, and you cannot support High King Vadallia's betrayal

of Cyre. You seek to bring glory to your ancestor, but you turned your back on the nation.

- Your patron ancestor was a pioneer in the Khorvaire expedition, renowned for making contact with members of other races. By joining a group of adventurers and exploring the unknown, you are reenacting the life of your ancestor.
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About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and Shadows of the Last War, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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